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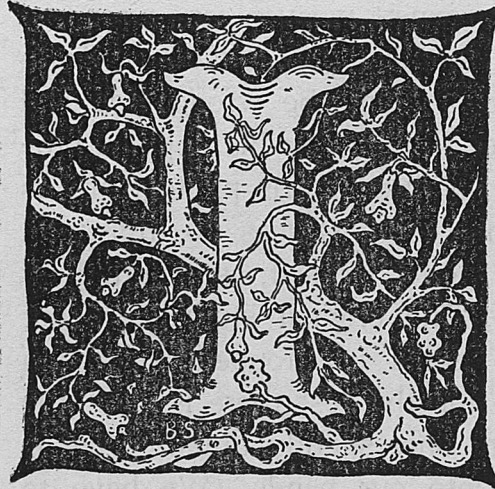
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CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN ART.—II



NCIDENTS from the legends of the saints are favorites with this school of modern painters of religious themes, but they also paint subjects from the New Testament, treated generally in a sensational manner, the principal intention being to attract attention. Some few painters like Irolli in Venice, and Meacci, a Sieneese, prefer idealistic themes, but they are

few and far between, and quite overshadowed by the others.

Michetti's paintings are designated by many critics as "strange and extravagant" but he undoubtedly is one of the strongest men of the impressionist school. It is worthy of notice that the Italians do not take kindly to the ugly in art. Even when they paint most realistically an inevitable tendency towards beauty of form and feature characterizes their pictures. After all that has been said and done the old traditions are too strong for them and they can not get over a prejudice in favor of something pleasant to look at. This remark does not always, however, apply to the sculptors, who seem to have given themselves over to the cult of the hideous, too often confounding ugliness with strength.

Not the least important of the modern Italian schools of painting is that of the seriously religious artists, of whom Barabino and Ciseri were two of the most distinguished. A picture by the last named artist, an *Ecce Homo*, exhibited after his death, created a decided sensation. It has a marked realistic character, the crowd in the distance is full of life and movement and the figure of Pilate, with his back turned to the spectator, is full of meaning and power. The figure of Christ is perhaps rather too

emaciated and ascetic ; it is in profile, and has rather a shadowy look. Ciseri is also the author of a fine picture in the church of Santa Felicità in Florence, representing the martyrdom of that saint and her seven sons. A pupil of Ciseri, Giacomo Martinetti, has lately made his mark by painting an excellent picture called *After the Crucifixion* for the Capuchin fathers at Jerusalem.

Nicolà Barabino was a Genoese, though he lived for some years, and ultimately died, in Florence. He was the author of the designs for the mosaics on the front of the Florentine Duomo. His paintings have some affinity with those of the Ghirlandajo, though he was by no means an imitator of them or anybody else. His figures have the portrait-like type of the men of that school, but they have a character of their own as well. His Madonnas are realistic but their surroundings are of an idealistic description. Luigi di Giovanni of Palermo, whose *Holy Thursday* was much admired at the Palermo Exhibition, Lorenni of Bergamo, Luigi Serra, Maccari and Giulio Monteverdi are among the best known of the painters of religious subjects, for which there is, of course, always a certain demand, for churches and oratories. It is not so hopeless a branch of art as historical painting has become. It is noticeable that in all the great cities of Italy which were formerly centers of art the works of modern artists retain the character of the antique work. Thus the Venetians continue to be noted for the superiority of their color, the Florentines for their drawing and the characteristic and portrait-like nature of their types.

It is melancholy to have to state that art instruction in Italy is in far from a flourishing condition. The most helplessly monotonous routine is followed in the academies ; years of drawing from the flat, or from the plaster, and a hopeless want of originality in subject drives the clever pupils to start off on their own account long before they have received sufficient instruction. Something numbing and stifling seems to cling to the very name "academy." Sculpture is clogged by the rage for monuments

and memorial statues which leads the men who wish to keep their names before the public to spend the greater portion of their time in working for competitions, of all forms of artistic work the most useless and least likely to conduce to real superiority. Now, since with very little modification all these monuments and statues are of the same type and character, they of course lead the artists towards a decided tendency to mannerism. The choice between a soldier on horseback and a civilian in modern costume is about all the freedom permitted. The awful specimens of misapplied skill in the shop of the dealers in so-called "decorative sculpture" hardly belong to the category of art at all, and yet there is no doubt that promising talent has often been diverted into this channel. Dupré, whose genius was purely religious, like that of Ciseri, has left a daughter whose works much resemble those of her father. She is the author of the statue of Santa Reparata on the front of the Florentine Duomo. Albano, who, though a native of Calabria, is settled in Florence, is an artist of consummate manual skill. He continues to work, although he has not of late produced any statue of striking originality. Carnielo, a Florentine, is engaged upon a group representing *Death and the Laborer*, which though repulsive in subject is rendered with great power. Carnielo has also modeled other statues of merit; he has a gift of fancy which enables him to produce lovely groups in relief of sylphs and fairies, really decorative in the best sense of the term. Testi is a promising young sculptor but he shows signs of veering in the direction of the dreadful shop-window style of work. Previati created a sensation some years ago by exhibiting a *Christ* treated in a more than realistic manner; more, as was said at the time, as if it had been intended for Barabbas than for Christ. Giovanni Niccolini has exhibited a very good bas-relief called *The Eternal Drama*, representing Life and Death. He has also modeled a figure called simply *A Strong Young Man*, which has something classic in its proportions.

One of the most striking of the Italian sculptors of the present day is Professor Barberi of the Academy of Bologna. He has sculptured for the Certoso at Bologna a dead Christ which has something of the character of the work of Rembrandt and Holbein in painting. The features are Semitic in type, and the expression noble and full of feeling. Another work of Barberi, the monument to the Bisteghi family in the cemetery at Bologna, has something of the character of the work of the painter Morelli and his followers. Upon a bed carefully copied from an extremely modern piece of furniture lies the body of an old man who has apparently just expired. A winged angel hovers above the couch ready to bear away his departing spirit. Beside the bed, and between it and the spectator, kneels the figure of a lady, evidently the new-made widow of the deceased. She is dressed in a fashionable costume of the day, not of this day but of a period sufficiently far back to have become ridiculous, at least to feminine eyes. This fashion of copying exactly the details of modern costume, so evanescent that before the figure is put into marble the fashion has become antiquated, prevails greatly at the present day in Italy for portrait sculpture as well as for monuments. The result is the production of works which have a tendency quite the reverse of touching, in the case of monuments, at least.

To sum up, the condition of art in Italy at the present moment seems not without promise. If the whole system of government instruction could be remodeled so as to be a help instead of a clog, and if the interest of the public in good art could be awakened, there might be a chance of better things. Talent there is, enough of it and to spare, but in the present sad state of financial depression, art suffers in company with the other interests of Italy.

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